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THE SIN OF DAVID



THE SIN OF DAVID

BY

STEPHEN PHILLIPS

AUTHOR OF "ULYSSES," ETC.

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TO
F. C.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

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320846

ACT I

CHARACTERS

SIR HUBERT LISLE,	{ <i>Commander of the Parliamentary forces in the Fenland.</i>
HUBERT,	{ <i>The child of Lisle and Miriam in Act III.</i>
COLONEL MARDYKE,	{ <i>Of the Parliamentary army, owner of Rushland, the headquarters of the army.</i>
COTTON, FINCH, MARSH, CRABLOVE, IRON,	{ <i>Officers of the Parliamentary army.</i>
JOYCE,	<i>A lieutenant.</i>
A DOCTOR.	
RATCLIFFE,	{ <i>Servant of Mardyke; afterward of Lisle.</i>
MIRIAM,	{ <i>Wife of Mardyke; afterward of Lisle.</i>
MARTHA,	<i>Sister of Mardyke.</i>

OFFICERS, NURSES, SOLDIERS, *etc.*

The period of the play is that of the English Civil War between Charles I and the Parliament.

THE SIN OF DAVID

ACT I

TIME. — *Summer of 1643, the first year of the war: noontide.*

SCENE. — *Hall of Rushland House, the headquarters of the Puritan army in the Fenslands. On the left a flight of steps leading up to a turret-chamber. A door on either side, on the right communicating outward, on the left inward. At the back, a door flanked by recessed windows opens on a terrace beyond, with foliage of poplars and*

alders, and a distant view of the Fens. Various military officers are standing in silence, with bowed heads and folded hands, as in prayer, around a table covered with papers. MARDYKE stands at the head of the table.

MARDYKE. [*After a pause.*] Now, sirs,
that we have sought the Lord in prayer,
Each one in silence, will we hear and
judge,
Knowing ourselves His mortal instruments.
All we with clean hearts unto judgment
come;
Yet in Thy sight no human heart is clean;
And if we punish others, we ourselves

Are ready to abide Thy punishment.

[*They slowly seat themselves.*]

Read, Captain! Who is charged with
mutiny,

With plunder or with harryings or with
flame,

Making God's army of the Fenland mocked,

A hissing and abomination, yea,

A laughter sweet unto the Philistine,

And all our fire, our kindling, and our zeal,

As ashes fallen, and as the greyness of
ashes?

Read!

COTTON. [*Rising with papers in his hand.*]

There is nothing here of mutiny,

Nor here is any charged with drunken rage,

With plunder or with harryings or with
flame,

To make God's army of the Fenland
mocked.

But one among us is of carnal crime
Loudly accused: 'tis charged against him
here

That he by violence hath a maid undone.

[*Murmurs.*

His name Lieutenant Joyce: who on this
cry

Arrested and close-guarded waits without.

FINCH. Is this already public in men's
mouths,

So noised we cannot overpass it, sir?

If not, 'twere well to mingle policy

With zeal, and hush it for the larger good.

MARSH. Publish it not, lest we be pointed
at.

Such is our cause a little smirch undoes
it,

By its own virtue the more vulnerable :
Greatness hath often by a whisper crashed.

COTTON. The thing is public and the
wayside talk ;

The clucking housewife hath it, and the
crone

Mumbles it sitting half-out in the sun.

MARDYKE. Public or no, I palter not
with heaven.

The sin is sinned ; and if we punish not,
Then stand we here partakers of the sin.

CRABLOVE. Doth Joyce deny this? Let
us hear him speak.

[MARDYKE *motions to bring in* JOYCE.

COTTON. Freely he hath confessed and
bides the issue.

Enter JOYCE, *guarded*

MARDYKE. Lieutenant, publicly you stand
accused

Of a young maid's enforcement: what say
you

In answer?

JOYCE. I make answer, "It is true."

MARDYKE. None here can come be-
tween thee and thy God.

Yet in mid-madness didst thou not recall

That thou wert more than Joyce: an officer

In this our righteous warring; that you
brought

This holy host into derision? Speak.

JOYCE. Her face was close to me, and
dimmed the world.

Yet have I fought, and in the front of all.
Shall one mad moment all those hours
outweigh?

Who being human is for ever sure?

MARDYKE. [*Rising.*] God needs not thy
polluted arm henceforth.

He asks not Captain, no, nor man-at-arms
Of heart unclean: thou shalt not fight for
Him.

Take him away! thy punishment with us.

[*Exit JOYCE, guarded.*]

Now, sirs, he hath confessed, his sentence
lies

With us.

FINCH. You, sir, who fought with Eng-
lish Vere

At Heidelberg, at Mannheim and Ostend,

Where'er the persecuted faithful fell,

Whose fame still clings about the vines of

France,

How dealt ye in those camps with carnal
crime?

MARDYKE. Our cause, as now, required
our spotlessness,

And we on grave occasion visited

Such sin with death!

Enter RATCLIFFE, with letter

RATCLIFFE. A letter, sir, post-haste.

MARDYKE. [*After glancing at letter.*]

Summon your mistress and my sister
here.

[*Exit* RATCLIFFE.]

This letter, sirs, concerns us all — I'll
read.

“I, Sir Hubert Lisle, being appointed by
the Parliament to the command of their
levies in the Fenland, where, as I hear,
there is much need of enkindling, do pro-
pose, by your leave, to make Rushland
House my headquarters. I know that your
zeal will not refuse me this if it be any
way possible; but I pray you excuse me
to your lady for so sudden demand on her

kindness. I follow hard on this letter, and am minded to stir up such a fire in this region as shall not easily be put out.

“HUBERT LISLE.”

[*Animated murmurs.*

Sirs, with my wife I must have speech forthwith,

And make such preparation as I may.

[*The officers retire in eager discussion on to the terrace at back, and from time to time they are visible conversing together during the scene which follows. Meanwhile MIRIAM and MARTHA enter. MIRIAM stands submissively before MARDYKE, who, intent*

*on letter, does not observe her for
a moment.*

Mistress, you must prepare, and instantly,
For entertainment of Sir Hubert Lisle,
Sent hither to command our Fenland host.
Learn then what manner of man is he who
comes ;

One sprung to arms from England's
chivalry,

Despising lure of courtier or of priest,
To fight the fight of freedom and of God :
In foreign battle nursed, yet not as we,
Stricken and bowed, but in his flush of
strength ;

Quickly provide, then ! Stand thou by his
chair

And bring with thine own hands the cup
of welcome :

See he lack nought thou canst bestow.

But hither! *[She turns to go.*

Miriam! heed well that you displease him not
By silly gaud on bosom or in hair,
Lest he account thee light, a daughter of
Gath.

I'll strip this chain from thee; these
wanton beads,

Meshes of Satan, grind I into dust.

*[He snatches chain roughly from her
and tramples it under foot.*

You, Martha, with a graver thought assist
My wife. Receive this guest as from the

Lord! *[Exit MARDYKE.*

MIRIAM. [*Trembling.*] Am I not as that
chain, trod underfoot,

Chidden and checked even more than when
a child?

MARTHA. My brother sternly broods, but
loves you still.

MIRIAM. Why, Martha, why could I not
ever stay

His daughter? So my dying father left me,
When side by side they fought at La
Rochelle;

And as his daughter grew I up submit;
Why must he then make me his wife?

MARTHA. Perchance
To shelter you, and comfort his grey
heart.

MIRIAM. I am no wife to him; and the
waked woman

Within me cries against the yoke and
loathes it.

MARTHA. Why to so loathed a marriage
did you yield?

MIRIAM. How could my orphanhood
withstand his will?

Did I not owe him all, refuge and bread,
And sheltering sustenance? Could I take
all,

And then refuse that petty price "myself,"
Sole price which he who gave so much
required?

Well I have paid to the full! He starves
my soul,

He locks my spirit up and keeps the
key.

MARTHA. Say not there is some other —

MIRIAM. No one. No.

My misery is faithful to him.

MARTHA. Child,

What is't you sigh for, whither would
you fly?

I cannot understand.

MIRIAM. Nor I myself;

And 'tis the very blindness of this beating
That makes of me a creature so unhappy,
And unto thee a plague.

MARTHA. Never, my child.

MIRIAM. O thou dear Martha, living
without sin,

And reputably rusting to the grave,
Thou vacant house moated about by
peace,

Thou shadow perfect, and thou blameless
ghost,

I cannot feed my soul on "Thou shalt
not."

I'll fight 'gainst numbness, wrestle against
rust.

There's the arch-foe of women! this doth
kill us.

Not pain, nor secret arrow of the mid-
night

That quivers till the bird-song, ended
faith,

Mortal surprise of marriage, nor the dawn

Of golden-vista'd children clouded quite,
Nor fallen loneliness where love hath been.
These, these are understood, wept o'er and
sung.

But worse, ah, worse the folding of the
hands,

The human face left by the tide of life,
The worm already at the human heart.

MARTHA. Sooner the worm than guilt
within the heart.

MIRIAM. No ! I would rather drench my
soul in sin

So I might feel this fire and grip this
glory,

The colour and the bloom and the music
of life !

MARTHA. Miriam ! no more I'll listen to
you. Know

That He who gave us life ordained us
law.

MIRIAM. Law ! And is law then but to
bind and freeze ?

By law the lightning spurts, and the earth
quakes,

And the spring surges thro' a million buds ;
And law is filled with rushings and with
thunder.

MARTHA. You must endure. Thy an-
cestors and mine

Went for their faith to torment and to fire.

MIRIAM. Ah, for their faith ! I hope
my blood is theirs,

And I would splash the flames about my
head

Gladly as in a bath for splendid death,
But for this life no life I was not born.

MARTHA. When there shall come a
child—

MIRIAM. Ah, speak it not!

A child of him! I sicken, I quake at it;
My very flesh doth shiver. Think you I
Could squander upon any child of him
The brooding balm and wistful riches, all
The holy longing that on summer evens
Arises homeless in my silent heart?
Babes that we love, we must have loved
ere birth.

[RATCLIFFE enters behind and beckons to

the officers outside. As he passes MIRIAM, he picks up chain and gives it her. She gives him her hand, which he kisses. She smiles sadly on him. He goes out.

MARTHA. See, they return. Come, then.

Give me the keys!

MIRIAM. Ah! might this tumult find at last a goal!

[*Exeunt MARTHA and MIRIAM.*

Reënter slowly military officers, who seat themselves at the table. Lastly enter MARDYKE. He sits at the head

MARDYKE. Do Thou, O Lord, direct a-right our minds,

And our decision be unto Thy glory!

Your judgment, sirs, upon Lieutenant Joyce!

Shall we but cast him from us as unclean?

Or shall we punish carnal crime with death?

FINCH. Purge we our army of the sinner; yet

See we deter not by too fierce a doom

Others that waver still from taking sword.

IRON. If outrage be not punished the whole land

Rising in wrath against us will take sword.

COTTON. My voice also for death; when war begins,

Mercy at first is cruelty at last.

MARSH. Break him, but leave him leisure to repent.

CRABLOVE. Enough we cast him straight-
way from among us.

MARDYKE. For death my voice; else
every one of us

Will into holy battle go unclean.

FINCH. [*Rising.*] The vote is even!

MARSH. What shall now decide?

[*Trumpet heard.*]

Enter RATCLIFFE, *hurriedly*

RATCLIFFE. Sir Hubert Lisle, sir, ridden
furiously.

MARDYKE. [*Rising.*] Lisle, our com-
mander: his the casting vote.

[*They all rise.*]

FINCH. On him alone the burden and
the issue.

Enter LISLE, spurred, and spattered with mud. MARDYKE advancing, LISLE takes him by the hand, and they stand looking at each other for an instant

LISLE. God save you, sirs, what business of the camp

Presses; what labour from the Lord awaits me?

MARDYKE. [*Motioning LISLE to head of table.*] This on the instant then:

Lieutenant Joyce,

Of this God's army, charged with carnal crime

In that he hath enforced the innocent

And brought a young maid into public shame.

This he denies not. Now three voices
here

Cry that we purge this holy host of him,
So satisfied; and three that he shall die.

With thee the casting vote. The Lord
speak through thee.

LISLE. [*Rising.*] Sirs, in no common
quarrel are we up,

Nor to a slight fray have we girded us,
But are embattled for dear liberty,

Dear liberty to righteousness affianced,

That each man on our English soil hence-
forth

Shall live his own life out beneath the sun,
Master of his own conscience, his own
soul,

And answerable only to his God :

For this and no less thing rise we in arms.

For this the noble hath disdained his ease,

For this the gentleman forsworn his hearth,

For this the yeoman left his glebe un-
ploughed,

For this doth brother clash with brother,
friend

With friend, and father smiteth his own
son :

For this have we preferred, rather than
reap

A servile tilth, to trample the sown field

And springing pasture to incarnadine.

But vain the father's and the brother's
blood,
c

Pasture ensanguined and abandoned hearth,
And worse than vain our liberty at last,
If we have builded it with hands defiled.

[*Murmurs of admiration.*

Therefore I show no mercy on this man.
Death! Let him die.

MARDYKE. Bring in Lieutenant Joyce.

Enter JOYCE, guarded

LISLE. Lieutenant, for the sake of that
high cause
For which we are embattled, and which
thou
Hast stained, I sentence thee forthwith
to death.

JOYCE. Death!

LISLE. To a soldier 'tis a little thing.

JOYCE. I do not count death as a little thing.

I cannot go out of the warm sunshine
Easily; yet I am a gentleman
And I can die.

LISLE. Hast anything to say?

JOYCE. Thou who so lightly dealest death
to me,

Be thou then very sure of thine own soul!

LISLE. I fear not that; and less do I
fear death.

[LISLE *dismisses* JOYCE *and* guards.

[*Drawing his sword.*] And judge me, Thou
that sittest in Thy heaven,

As I have shown no mercy, show me
none!

Deal Thou to me what I have dealt to him.

Nay, more; not the mere death that he
shall die,

Strike at the heart, the hope, the home
of me,

If ever a woman's beauty shall ensnare

My soul unto such sin as he hath sinned.

[MIRIAM *has entered with wine and
stands waiting.* LISLE, *lowering his
sword, sees her before him and
stands motionless.*

MARDYKE. Sir Hubert Lisle, my wife!

To her I leave you.

[*Exit MARDYKE and others.* MIRIAM
pours out wine and proffers LISLE
the cup.

LISLE. [*Taking cup.*] Lady, I thank
you, and must ask your pardon
For breaking in on you so suddenly
And so disordered — I would say — but you,
You are not of our country?

MIRIAM. No, of France,
And I was born in the sun's lap — will
you
Not rest awhile?

[*She moves as if to conduct him.*]

LISLE. [*Hesitating.*] You are then of
that land
Where flows the crimson wine that now I
drink?
Is't not so?

MIRIAM. Even so.

LISLE. [*Holding up the wine.*] And in
such glory

Have you fared hither to us over sea.

MIRIAM. Will you not rest? [*Again
moving.*]

LISLE. [*Going, then again hesitating.*] I
thank you.

MIRIAM. See — this way.

LISLE. And you — how long since is it
that you left

Your southern vines?

MIRIAM. I came here as a child;
My father died at La Rochelle.

LISLE. Alas!

MIRIAM. Committing me to Colonel
Mardyke's care,

Who was his comrade then.

LISLE.

And who is now

Your husband ?

MIRIAM.

Yes. Your room, sir,

eastward lies.

LISLE. I will come with you — and

these glimmering fens,

Do they not pall after the southern glow?

MIRIAM. I am grown used to them.

LISLE.

And yet it seems

Strange in the drear fenland to light on
you.

MIRIAM. How still the air is: scarcely
can one breathe.

A storm approaches — [*Hesitating.*] Will
this war soon end?

LISLE. Not till we triumph — or —
darker it grows.

This leads us to the garden? See how
still

That poplar, conscious of some heavy
fate!

That breathless alder! Like to guilty
souls

Against a coming judgment.

MIRIAM. [*Hesitating.*] Is there aught
Wherein I still can serve you?

LISLE. [*Coming toward her.*] No, I
thank you.

MIRIAM. I have made all ready —
[*Hesitates.*]

LISLE. Every bird doth cower.

MIRIAM. [*Going, but returning.*] I have
laid some books within your room —
you read

Much — so they say — I thought — how the
air faints

As though beneath some suffocating
clutch!

LISLE. Darker and darker yet — what
books are dear

To you?

MIRIAM. Old histories.

LISLE. That mandolin —

You touch it in the twilight?

MIRIAM. Not with art.

How the air sighed then! Nearer comes
the storm ;

A moment and 'twill break above our
heads.

LISLE. [*Coming close to her.*] Sweet
after battle must thy music be.

[*A sudden sound of musketry heard
without.*]

MIRIAM. What sound was that? That
was no thunder-peal.

LISLE. Lieutenant Joyce of this God's
army, shot

By my command!

MIRIAM. What crime hath he
committed

That you take on you God's prerogative
Of death?

LISLE. How can I name it to you! He

Hath sinned against a maid.

MIRIAM. But such a doom!

LISLE. No doom too harsh! In this
our virgin cause

We of that sin must purify us—thus.

[LISLE bows to MIRIAM, who goes off slowly and trembling. LISLE starts to follow her, but controls himself with effort. He goes slowly to back, and as he stands looking out, a low mutter of thunder is heard.

ACT II

ACT II

TIME. — *Three weeks later: night.*

SCENE. — *The same as Act I.* MIRIAM AND
MARTHA *discovered, MIRIAM touching man-*
dolin absently. MARTHA at work on em-
broidery, a lamp beside her.

MIRIAM. [*Sings.*]

I

Red skies above a level land
And thoughts of thee;
Sinking sun on reedy strand,
And alder tree.

II

Only the heron sailing home,
With heavy flight:
Ocean afar in silent foam,
And coming night.

III

Dwindling day and drowsing birds,
O my child!
Dimness and returning herds,
Memory wild.

MARTHA. What sorrow of the gloaming
dost thou sing?

MIRIAM. Of some bereaved woman in
the Fens.

*[Casting aside instrument and coming
over to MARTHA.]*

O Martha !

MARTHA. Well, child — will you help
me here ?

These eyes begin to fail in lamp-light now.

MIRIAM. [*Kneeling by her.*] Dear
Martha !

MARTHA. Ah ! just here I cannot — well,
Weary of music ?

MIRIAM. Let me lay my head
Here in thy lap as in the olden days
Then when I was a child.

MARTHA. You'd have me idle
As you are, — there, then !

[*Taking her face in her hands.*]

MIRIAM. Was I a bad child,
Martha ?

MARTHA. Ah, no! but headlong ever and
rash.

MIRIAM. Cruel?

MARTHA. Not with intention.

MIRIAM. Ah, but still
Of others too regardless?

MARTHA. As a child is.

MIRIAM. I am so happy; let me hide
my face

Here.

MARTHA. If so happy, child, why so
afraid?

MIRIAM. No! not afraid.

MARTHA. I am glad that you are happy,
That shows me you are humbler, that your
heart

Is tamed; thence only cometh happiness.

MIRIAM. [*Looking up.*] I am not tamed!

MARTHA. Well — more at rest then.

MIRIAM. Rest!

MARTHA. Now you are weeping. Who
shall guess your soul,

Miriam? So happy now, and now wild
tears.

MIRIAM. You know, you know, I would
not hurt you, no,

Nor — him, not willingly — never was cruel.

MARTHA. You say you would not hurt
me nor —

MIRIAM. Your brother.

MARTHA. Your husband.

MIRIAM. No — not willingly — and yet —

MARTHA. What would you say?

MIRIAM. Nothing. I know not what.

*[She again takes up mandolin, then
casts it down, coming to MARTHA
again.]*

Martha, dear Martha, why are you not
kind?

MARTHA. Kind! you to say I am not kind.

MIRIAM. O, kind —

But — but you love me deeply, do you not?

MARTHA. What need to ask?

MIRIAM. Whate'er I *did*, me, me
You love?

MARTHA. I fear so; but you will do
nothing

I could not also love.

MIRIAM.

I cannot tell.

[*Then suddenly.*] Come, give me both your
hands. I hold you fast—

You cannot fly—look not on me. I fear,
I fear to be alone with him—the stranger,
Within our gates—cast me not from you
yet!

MARTHA. [*Rising.*] If this be true, it
is a deadly sin!

The blackest—to your knees and seek
your God.

But I'll not think it, cannot imagine, dream
it.

'Tis folly, the fruit of too much idleness.
But hearken, Miriam! though it be but
folly,

It must be plucked from out you, flung
away,

Else I will seek my brother out, I am
His faithful friend — but 'tis unthinkable!

*Enter MARDYKE, hurriedly, with a letter in
his hand, accompanied by RATCLIFFE*

MARDYKE. [To RATCLIFFE.] Summon
the council hither, on the instant!

[Exit RATCLIFFE.]

[Turning to MIRIAM.] Idle — still idle!
and in time of war!

A night of peril! yet the strings are
heard.

Mistress, bestir you! To your household
tasks,

And make this dwelling ready for the
night!

And then to bed! else will I lock you up:
Provide you bread to eat, water to drink.
I'll starve this fiend of indolence out of you.

MARTHA. Brother, you speak not wisely.

MARDYKE.

Ah, do you

Sustain her?

MARTHA. 'Tis not wise to use her thus;
I tell you, 'tis not wise; such roughness
makes

All women desperate.

MARDYKE.

Wisdom from women!

MARTHA. You would not have your way
with me thus — nor

Will you with her — your wife.

MARDYKE.

Leave us together.

[*Exit* MARTHA.

That which I spoke, I spoke it not in
jest.

I who have warred, and still do war for
God,

Will keep a diligent wife, a quiet house,
Still and severe as fits our sacred cause.
You hear me?

MIRIAM. Sir, you hurt my wrist—
forbear.

MARDYKE. Remember! To your duties
—then to bed!

[*Exit* MIRIAM.

Meanwhile the officers enter

How long, sirs, must we tarry idle here?

On all sides are we hemmed; where shall
we strike?

IRON. Where is Sir Hubert Lisle?

MARDYKE. Shut in his room.

IRON. The peril gathers, yet that vacant
chair!

[Murmurs from officers.]

Sirs, I will speak no treason, yet we marvel
Why thus we are hemmed in idle. I will
voice

The general fear; he who should lead us,
faints.

[Murmurs of assent.]

Who captains us? One, dazed and dubi-
ous.

Sir Hubert Lisle is fallen into a trance.

What purpose hath he, what direction,
torn

This way and that, hither and thither
blown?

Now he commands, anon he counter-
mands;

Now is he hot for battle, now he cools,
This man, who fell amidst us like a brand.
And all the night he paces to and fro,
Murmuring and wrestling as with one
unseen.

What curse lies heavy on him, or what
spell?

Now let him wake, or be some other
chosen.

[*Murmurs.*

MARDYKE. Lift we a prayer that heaven
restore his mind.

IRON. Yet, while we pray, is Rupert
thundering down.

*Enter LISLE, dreamily, with roses in his
dress*

LISLE. Forgive, I pray you, sirs, this
tardiness.

Sirs, you all frown on me and stare distrust.

I have fallen into a lethargy of spirit

Which even now is passing from me.

Friends,

Let me not lose your faith.

MARDYKE.

Sir, we but ask

Some guiding from you, and some certain
light.

Darker our fortunes grow, on all sides
pressed,
And threatened north and west. Where
shall we strike?

IRON. I say, take water northward and
relieve

Fairfax in Hull.

MARDYKE. Or threaten suddenly
Newark, where now are horsemen swarm-
ing thick
Upon our flank.

CRABLOVE. And, sir, still Willoughby
In vain beleaguers Castle Bolingbroke.

MARDYKE. Quick flies the night. Shall
we aid Willoughby?
Or hurl a force on Newark, or free Hull?

LISLE. [*Hesitatingly.*] To me it seems
'twere wiser here to bide,

[*Murmurs.*

Holding the Whitton and the Welland line,
Breaking the foe with bog and with mo-
rass;

Here let us lie, alert, but not o'er-hot.
We have much need of discipline severe,
Patience and quiet rule and still debate,
Till each man shall attain self-mastery.
Now leave me, sirs; for I must meditate,
And wrestle in spirit lest I be o'ercome.

[*Exeunt officers, sullenly shaking their
heads.*

MARDYKE. [*Rising.*] I will go up to
the turret-room, and mark

If, in God's book, some chapter or some
verse

May give us warning in our present need.

[MARDYKE, *unlocking case, takes down Bible, and ascends to tower with lighted candle. LISLE sits plunged in gloomy revery and studying a map distractedly. MIRIAM passes across the stage hurriedly, with keys at her girdle. LISLE, seeing her, comes forward.*

LISLE. Lady, will you not touch the
strings again?

With music lift from me this heaviness?

MIRIAM. I may not, sir. I am accused
of sloth,

And must about the business of the house.

Here are my keys.

LISLE. [*Seeing her wrist.*] See, you
have hurt your wrist.

MIRIAM. 'Tis nothing.

LISLE. But 'tis bruised as by a blow!

Miriam! — my heart spoke then. This burn-
ing silence,

Secret eye lightnings, and deep mutual sighs,
And darting comprehensions of swift thought,
Must break in words at last.

MIRIAM. [*Trembling.*] I will not hear
them.

LISLE. Hear them! and then do with
me what you will.

When I spurred hither, all on fire for God,

Then did I gallop into human flame.

Cold I had lived, pure, narrow, temperate,

A girded swordsman pressing to the mark.

So rode I through that gate. Then suddenly

Thy beauty like a tempest fell on me ;

And in one moment was I rent and riven.

Stunned is my life ; I wander, and I grope.

My voice in the council falters ; in mid-act

This lifted arm falls at thy floating face.

They waver like to mist the ranks of war,

They waver and fade ; he fades, the armed

man,

And spurring armies in a vision clash.

Or would I pray and upward fling my
hands?

To thee I pray, thee, thee, with cries be-
seeching.

I am lost, lost!

MIRIAM. O, I would be to thee
As gentle as the grass above the dead;
And have I been but darkness, and a
sword?

LISLE. No! for a revelation breaks
from thee.

Thou hast unlocked the loveliness of earth,
Leading me through thy beauty to all
beauty.

Thou hast admitted me to mystery,
Taught me the different souls of all the
stars;

Through thee have I inherited this air,

Discovered sudden riches at my feet,
And now on eyes long blinded flames the
world.

Thou shattering storm, thou eve of after
blue,

Thou deluge, and thou world from deluge
risen,

Thou sudden death, and thou life after
death !

[A pause while she stands trembling.]

You speak not. Give me but a human
word.

MIRIAM. O, all my life has listened for
thy step !

LISLE. How have I walked in glory
unaware !

O, let your dear soul forth; stay it not
now!

MIRIAM. For thee alone came I into
this world,

For thee this very hair grew glorious,
My eyes are of this colour for thy
sake.

This moment is a deep inheriting,
And as the solemn coming to a kingdom.

LISLE. Apart we two did wander in-
land; now

Listen, the ocean of infinity!

Life hath no more in it.

MIRIAM. [*Lying in his arms.*] My final
peace!

LISLE. Peace?

MIRIAM. Doth the word seem cold?

 A woman's peace,

It hath all fire in it, and burneth white.

LISLE. Peace! Is there peace while
 all —

MIRIAM. Wake me not yet,
Not for this moment!

LISLE. While this dreaming love
Gives you the language of a child or a
 bird,
Of a light and liquid rapture.

MIRIAM. Speak not yet
Too human and too grave.

LISLE. Yet every way
I look is darkness; for each moment
 war

May call me off.

MIRIAM. Peer not into the dark.

LISLE. Else will it swallow us. O suddenly

We two must hew us out a path.

MIRIAM. Disturb not
This hush and church of passion with the
world!

LISLE. How thy speech wantons, while
I stare at life!

MIRIAM. Hush! I am lifted even above
hope!

LISLE. He, he—

MIRIAM. Thou hast my spirit,
be content.

O, all that in me wanders and is wild

Gathers into one wave that breaks on
thee!

LISLE. And I must bide, till this full
beauty drop

Which even divinity did flush to dream.

Thou witherest like a virgin at his side.

[A sudden trumpet. They start apart.]

MIRIAM. Hark!

LISLE. Tidings from the camp!

MIRIAM. I'll leave you, then.

[Sound of hurried steps.]

LISLE. Some business easily despatched!

MIRIAM. I'll walk

Here, on the terrace, till you shall decide

This petty business.

Enter soldier, with letter, accompanied by

FINCH

LISLE. A brief "Yes" or "No."

*[Exit MIRIAM. LISLE takes letter and
reads it silently.]*

Ah!

FINCH. You are stricken, sir; lean on
this arm.

LISLE. No! but stand by; this matter
presses. Go!

[Exit soldier and FINCH.]

[Reading aloud.]

"TO SIR HUBERT LISLE, *Commander*:

"The Castle of Bolingbroke still bays all
attack. Those whom I have with me are

too few: the breach I have made too slight. Another day and relief bursts upon us from Newark.

“There is no way but by sudden onslaught, and that by daybreak. Who then shall lead this? Whom hast thou in the army of such desperate valour, that, in scorn of life, he will adventure? For he who shall lead such onslaught, may already count himself as dead. Yet, on this hazard, stand our fortunes in this region. Hast thou a man of such fiery zeal that others follow him? Then, send him quickly. Let him know what peril awaits him; but yet that on his peril hang our hopes.

“Knowing well thine own spirit, I entreat
that thou thyself shalt not so adventure;
for thy life is of the worth of many cities.
Speed! Speed!

“WILLOUGHBY.”

[LISLE *sits down and spreads letter
before him under lamp.*

And why should I not send — him?

He is ripe

With such experience as none other hath
In breaches and in onslaughts both in
France

And in the foreign fenland; he, I say,
Of all the host is the one only man,
The apparent instrument. I do but send

Him whom the peril asks, by man un-
blamed.

With God how stand I? Vain to palter
there.

I'd have the husband dead that I might
clasp

The wife secure. If then behind the
deed

The mind can murder, and the heart can
kill;

Then this mere silent wish, born of the
brain,

Might instantly start up a living thing

And able, without hands, to strike?

What were I better than the lurking thief,

Or hired assassin stealing from behind,

To stab him in the back? He shall
not go.

Let him succumb to the slow hour, or
drop

By sudden death-shot in mid-battle, or
sink

In casual fever — I'll not do this thing.

Rather myself will go; leave pure this
house,

And hurl this lured soul upon the breach.

*[He starts to go when MIRIAM enters
softly, behind, from moonlit terrace.]*

MIRIAM. Hast thou despatched?

LISLE. Ah, thou?

MIRIAM. Hast thou not yet

Determined?

LISLE. [*Hesitating as he gazes at her.*]

No, not yet ; there's more in this
Than I had looked for.

MIRIAM. [*Stretching out her arms for letter.*]

May I read it? Oft,
A woman's mind is lightning, where men
grope.

[LISLE *refuses to give letter to her.*
So weighty is it?

LISLE. Even with life and death.
Nay, more : who knows? with all eternity.

MIRIAM. [*Quickly.*] Not perilous to thee?

LISLE. Perhaps ! Away !
Thy moonlight loveliness disturbs me.

MIRIAM. Words
To make me stay ; but, yet, I will not. I

Am heavy with the treasure thou hast
given me,

And I will steal within and spread it out.

I long to lock me in and be alone

With these new riches in the dimness.

LISLE.

Ah!

Come back.

MIRIAM. [*Laughing softly.*] I shall disturb
thee.

LISLE. Yet stay on.

Can you not hear Time rushing past our
ears,

With audible, irreparable flight?

MIRIAM. [*Gazing outward and sighing.*]

How e'en the Fenland hath grown fairyland
And all these levels gleam as passionate

As the high gardens of Assyrian kings.

I shall not sleep—I cannot tell thee
why—

[*Leaning toward him.*

Oh, thou dost know! Good night!

LISLE. Thou shalt not go.
Thy hair hath slipped, and showers round
thee. Now,

I hold thee all dishevelled in the moon;
I cannot clasp thy spirit; thee, I ask,
Thus in thy glorious body—thee!

MIRIAM. I tremble.

LISLE. That smile hath made a mist of
all the world.

MIRIAM. [*Starting from him.*] Listen, one
cometh on us.

LISLE. Who?

MIRIAM. Alas!

[Rushes from him.]

LISLE. *[Coming wildly down from terrace into the room, sees the letter and snatches it up. Steps are heard, and MARDYKE is seen slowly descending the stairs. Meanwhile the moon is clouded, and a light rain begins to fall.]* Old man, within this moment hast thou died.

Enter MARDYKE, with Bible, which he lays on table.

MARDYKE. It seemed, a while since,
that a trumpet blew;

Still, by the book I sat; but have not
found

Chapter or verse that lights our present
need.

What tidings from the camp, what sudden
word?

LISLE. Prepare to spur at once to
Bolingbroke.

MARDYKE. Now on the instant?

LISLE. On the instant. Thou
Art needed there. Grave conference is
held.

Thy famed experience in foreign siege
The general asks. Thee only can I send.

MARDYKE. The moon is quenched; yet
lighten Thou this dark.

Thou great Taskmaster, if unto Thy service
Me Thou hast called, I go and murmur not.

LISLE. Arm thee and quickly, ere the
blinded dawn

Peer on the drizzling levels. Fast!
Away!

MARDYKE. With joy I go. I thank
Thee, O my Lord,

That Thou hast not discarded me as old,
A cumberer of the ground, a loppèd
branch,

But Thou hast service still for these grey
hairs.

Light though the task, I'll kindle it with
fire.

Restore to these old bones and cramped
limbs

Speed and the ancient strength of other days

Then when I battled and bled at La
Rochelle.

Ratcliffe! at once my armour, and my
horse.

[*Exit* MARDYKE.]

LISLE. [*Taking pen and writing.*] "I
send you the man fitted for our purpose;
of mighty zeal and valour, and one that
can enkindle others to a hazard. Let
him, then, lead this assault. He knoweth
his own peril and wherefore he is sent.
He himself beareth this letter. He
bringeth his life in his hand. Send me
swift news of the assault—and of him."

[*Voices are heard, and the sound of
running to and fro. Reënter*

MARDYKE, *half-armed, with* RATCLIFFE, *who hastily helps him to finish his arming.*

MARDYKE. [*To* RATCLIFFE.] Buckle me closer there; and, here, more room.

RATCLIFFE. Thy back lies open here!

MARDYKE. In such a cause
I fear no stab in the back; the front
is all.

LISLE. Here is a letter: into Willoughby's hand
Deliver it.

MARDYKE. Shall I be long from home?

LISLE. I think not—till to-morrow at sunset.

Reënter MIRIAM from the other side

MIRIAM. Whither so suddenly, in the
dead night?

LISLE. Your husband summoned to the
camp, straightway.

MARDYKE. Our officers hold conference;
no more,

My voice is needed; prattle not — to
bed!

Woman hath no concern in this.

MIRIAM. But when
Shall you return?

MARDYKE. To-morrow, by sunset.

[LISLE goes out on terracc. MIRIAM
watches MARDYKE finishing his
arming.]

My sword, now!

Enter SERVANT, hurriedly

SERVANT. Sir, the horse stands.

MIRIAM. [*To MARDYKE, who goes to the door.*] Sir, good-night!

MARDYKE. There, then — [*Kisses her on forehead.*] Such joy have I in buckling me

Again in armour, all things I forget;

Suddenly wife and home are gone from me.

[*MIRIAM goes from him to the door.*

Good-night, Sir Hubert. Peace be on this house!

LISLE. [*Coming down.*] Sir, shall I go in place of thee? 'Tis not

Too late!

MARDYKE. Have I not prayed? The
Lord hath chosen.

[*Exit* MARDYKE *with* RATCLIFFE.

LISLE *goes out on terrace — sound
of hoofs galloping away into the
night. A cold glimmer of dawn
appears far off.*

MIRIAM. When doth the conference
end?

LISLE. To-morrow!

MIRIAM. Then,
A little while is ours. So cold? But
now —

LISLE. A moment, Miriam! I must
think alone.

I am sore troubled.

MIRIAM. Kiss me—I will go.

[LISLE makes movement as though to embrace her, but cannot.]

Am I despised, then, that I could not hide
What burned in me? I should have fenced
and fenced

And so had reverence—you despise me?

LISLE. Ah!

The starkness of the dawn is at my heart.

MIRIAM. O, how I scorn myself—and
yet—[Putting her hand on his shoulder and looking in his face.] Good-
night!

[Exit MIRIAM.]

LISLE. I ne'er did love thee so as at
this moment.

As he turns, enter RATCLIFFE

Who's there?

RATCLIFFE. I, sir.

LISLE. Well, well?

RATCLIFFE. The holy Book!

I come to lock it safe. Each night it is
My master's custom. Or, I'll leave it thus;
If haply you would seek in it some verse
To light our present trouble.

LISLE. Leave it, then!

*[Exit RATCLIFFE. A sallow gleam of
dawn falls on the Book, as LISLE
opens and reads; and the sound
of galloping hoofs is borne back
once more on the wind.]*

"And it came to pass in the morning,

that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.

“And the men of the city went out and fought with Joab : and there fell some of the people of the servants of David ; and Uriah the Hittite died also.”

[A faint sound of galloping hoofs is again heard, and then ceases.]

ACT III

ACT III

TIME. — *Five years later.*

SCENE. — *A room in a house on the outskirts of the town of Wakefield. At back a window looks out on the open country. On its right a door communicates with the outer courtyard; on the left another opens into the sleeping rooms of the house. LISLE discovered, seated, with papers before him; on one side RATCLIFFE, on the other two officers in attendance.*

LISLE. Old Ratcliffe, ask my wife to
come to me.

Stay! She was hushing up the child to
sleep,

Low singing over him; say will she come
If he is sleeping now.

[*Exit* RATCLIFFE.]

Sirs, we have seen
Three years of seeming peace; yet here I
hold

Letters in Fairfax' hand; he apprehends
In Kent and Essex disaffection; speaks
Of imminent trouble. What of Wakefield
then

And all this region; see you any cause
Here for disquiet?

OFFICER. None, sir, save from bands
Roaming in indolent undiscipline,
Hither and thither, plundering purposeless.

LISLE. No smouldering mischief then?

OFFICER. None visible.

Enter MIRIAM with child. Officers retire

MIRIAM. Hubert—he will not sleep,
but must put on
His sword and strut with it. Ah! let
him stay.

LISLE. Well—well! thy sword already
girded on,
Yet, sir, they tell me that no peril
threatens.

[*To MIRIAM.*] How straight he stands!
His colour too not bright

Nor dull; but with a blander glow of
blood.

I think that he hath more of me than
thee.

MIRIAM. No, Hubert, no.

LISLE. His eyes! Those are my eyes.

MIRIAM. Only in colour! but that way
they ope

Wide at the world, that is all mine.

LISLE. Perhaps.

MIRIAM. Then, too, his mouth?

LISLE. Mine, mine in every curve.

MIRIAM. If you had watched him smile
as close as I

You would not say that; all his smile is
mine.

I grant that when he frets, his mouth will
drop

Like to his father's.

LISLE. So! from thee his joy,
From me his sadness.

MIRIAM. Hubert, no! when he
Doth sadden, that same dimness o'er him
comes

As upon me.

LISLE. Will you claim all of him?
His eyes, his mouth, his sad hour and his
bright?

His hair, now, see that curl behind the
ear.

Come, you must yield me that.

MIRIAM. O, that perhaps.

LISLE. Will you not leave me any part
in him?

MIRIAM. Oh, yes! his cry when he
would fight off sleep.

LISLE. [*Laughing.*] Well, well, sweet,
we will quarrel over him

No longer; he is fair and strong and
bright.

How his young face hath mellowed our
first passion,

What flamed then is a glow more beautiful.

Yet is thy love of me not less?

MIRIAM. How — less?

LISLE. The former fury hath gone out of it,
The pulsing life, the blinding dance of
blood.

MIRIAM. The child hath brought a
tremble into it.

I am grown fearful for the sake of him;
I dread the rustle of angels in his room.

LISLE. And now doth he divide what
once was mine

Wholly.

MIRIAM. Ah, no! he hath enriched that
love.

Once did it live upon thy look, thy
voice,

Thy strength, thy courage, and thy con-
queror soul,

This was enough, God knows. But,
Hubert, now

We two together to behold our boy,

That we have reared and planted sunward,
grow,

While all our sighs like breezes come to
him,

And all our tears fall down on him like
rain.

I thought thou never couldst be more to
me ;

But now is added to that rapturous fire
Much that perhaps of men is not esteemed,
But to a woman meaneth half her life.

To hold our sweet night council o'er his
day,

To exchange bright understandings silently
At little words of his ; to bend, we two
Over him dreaming while thy hand on mine

Tightens a moment; then to watch together

Some little way of thee or me appear

Sudden in him; to feel our daily life

Grow solemn at his voice: to see our
spirits,

Close though they met in kiss and
breathèd word,

Visibly here commingled and made flesh.

LISLE. Now blows the future sweet into
our eyes,

And even peril treadeth upon grass.

Enter RATCLIFFE

RATCLIFFE. A sudden messenger from
Pomfret ridden!

Enter messenger, hurriedly

MESSENGER. Sir, all the country around

Pomfret walls

Is risen up; the castle is cut off:

We foraging without, found no return.

They signal for relief; and one even now

Behind me rideth furiously, I fear

Bringing worse news.

LISLE. [*To RATCLIFFE.*] Bid Arlington

prepare

With all our horsemen instantly to spur

To Pomfret; then if he who rides behind

Bear us worse tidings, I myself will lead.

[*Exit RATCLIFFE with messenger.*]

MIRIAM. [*To child, who falls back on*

her shoulder.] Ah, darling!

LISLE. How, what ails the child?

MIRIAM.

There, there,

Is thy head heavy? On my bosom then.

LISLE. Now, Hubert, little Hubert, draw
thy sword!

[*Child attempts, but fails to draw
sword.*]

See thus! [*Drawing his own.*] Not even
a smile! Why he would laugh
And leap at this an hour since.

MIRIAM.

He is heavy.

Hush! do not speak to him.

LISLE. [*Bending over him.*] What
dreams I have

For thee.

MIRIAM. What dost thou dream?

LISLE.

He shall be tall.

MIRIAM. No taller than thyself.

LISLE. I'd have him shoot
Beyond me both in inches and in deeds.

MIRIAM. A soldier?

LISLE. No ! when he shall grow a man
The land will cry for rest. I see him
then

A healer and a closer up of wounds.
His task shall be to obliterate and soothe ;
To bind, not break ; to mingle, not to mar ;
His counsel breathing on our England balm.
This labour more than battle asks a man.

MIRIAM. It is a noble dream.

LISLE. And shall come true.
Or he shall build in new lands over sea
Some virgin commonwealth.

RATCLIFFE. [*Entering hastily.*] A horse-
man, sir,

Spurred sweating to the gate.

LISLE. Summon him in!

Enter soldier, breathlessly

SOLDIER. From Pomfret, sir, where we
are hard beset.

The town may fall each moment, totters
now ;

And only in the sight of thee is hope.

LISLE. [*To MIRIAM.*] Dear, I must go.

[*To soldier.*] Tell Colonel Arlington
That I myself will lead; let all stand by.
Ratcliffe, a breastplate and a helm enough!

[RATCLIFFE *hastily arms him.*

Old man, why do thy fingers fumble thus,

Or have thine eyes dimmed suddenly?
Apace!

RATCLIFFE. O, sir, this very night-time,
five years flown,
Thus armed I my old master, when he fell
By Castle Bolingbroke.

LISLE. This very night?

RATCLIFFE. This night; when I did
leave the holy Book
Unlocked for you to search it.

LISLE. I remember.

RATCLIFFE. Again the night is here!
My fingers fumble
About the straps as then. Pray God this
night
May not see dawn like that!

LISLE. Leave me — enough.

[*Exit* RATCLIFFE.]

[*Aside.*] I sent him then! Now I myself
must go.

MIRIAM. [*To child, with whom she is
walking to and fro.*] Now thou art
hot, now cold.

LISLE. Art thou, dead man,
Urging me down that road where thee I sped?

MIRIAM. [*Bringing child to LISLE.*]
Hubert, his face!

LISLE. [*Suddenly, gazing on child.*] Or,
or — give me the child.

MIRIAM. What's this?

LISLE. [*To child.*] Close, close, your
arms about my neck.

That I may speak with him.

[Kissing child and looking after them.]

[Exit MIRIAM with child.]

Why on this night

Doth the child sicken suddenly? Ah,

folly!

Childhood is quickly sick and quickly well.

[A pause.]

Or do the dead remember still? Perhaps

The spirit of the murdered fresh in wrath

Leaps out upon his murderer, but in vain,

Baffled by loss of corporal faculty.

May he not then a spirit vengeance seek,

A vengeance not of hands, and learn to

blight

And cripple; and perhaps the matin chill

Can use, and all the fatal airs of night,
And can direct the wandering malady
Whither he will? If he then whom I slew
Is aiming in such vengeance at the child?
Wilt thou revenge thee on bright curls
and cheeks,
And wilt thou lunge, grey swordsman, at
a babe?

Enter doctor, from within

Now, doctor, now! How is't with him?

DOCTOR. He lies

In some mysterious languor, and my art
Reaches him not.

LISLE. Is then the malady

To human healers new?

DOCTOR. To me at least.

LISLE. Is it not written in thy category?

DOCTOR. I cannot reach the seat and fount of it.

LISLE. Stands it not on the list, the cause, the cure?

DOCTOR. Show me the cause; then will I find the cure.

LISLE. What symptom hath he? Or what certain sign?

DOCTOR. No spot hath he, nor fever rash; yet fever.

LISLE. Doth he cry out? or lies he silent still?

DOCTOR. He makes no cry, yet struggles as he lies.

LISLE. With what doth the child struggle, how beset?

DOCTOR. He seems to fend a something from his throat.

LISLE. [*With a cry.*] Thou dead man, take thy fingers from his throat;

He is a young thing and a little—ah!

Back to him, doctor, linger not—yet stay;

Think you that heaven doth ever intervene

With special sickness, and for some rank fault

In us, doth strike us there where most we love?

DOCTOR. 'Tis our presumption to imagine it.

We fancy those regardless-rolling orbs,

Themselves inhabited, tremendous worlds,
Night-lights to reassure us in the dark.
We colour with our trespasses the eclipse,
And hear paternal anger in the storm;
Impute to sickness wrath, vengeance to
death,

And memory to unrecording Nature.

LISLE. Perhaps — back to his bed.

DOCTOR. What man can do
I'll do.

[*Exit doctor.*]

LISLE. [*With uplifted hands.*] O,

Thou that sittest in Thy heavens,
Mine was the sin; be mine the punish-
ment,

But let him live. End me with lightning, or

In fever let me burn down to the grave,
But let him live. Make ashes of my
life,

Take from me every hope—but let him
live!

Strike here, here, and not elsewhere!

Or if

I may not look for mercy, yet must she,
Who of that murder goeth innocent,
Walk with me hand in hand into this
fire?

By our two souls that anchor on his life,
O, wilt Thou smite where all is holiest,
Smite at the very fount of hope and faith,
And wring the spirit for the fault of
flesh?

Or if with mine her doom entangled be,
What hath he done that he must pay the
price?

What crime committed save the being
born?

Then must my sin cancel for him the
light,

Put out the recent sunbeam, and make
blank

The murmurs and the splendours of the
world?

O Father, by that hour, when Thou wast
dimmed

To human in the clouds on Calvary! —

Enter soldier, suddenly

I come, but to a phantom conflict there;

I leave behind the real battle here.

[*Exit LISLE.*

[*After a pause, RATCLIFFE slowly enters and puts out the lights one by one, and goes out, leaving the stage in complete darkness. After a pause a female figure is seen issuing from the door on the left, who goes over to the window at the back, and, withdrawing slowly the curtain, the glimmer of dawn is seen. She stands a moment gazing outward; a single sigh of wind is heard. Enter RATCLIFFE, wearily, from the door on the right. He is about to cross the*

room when the woman stops him with finger on her lip and points to door of sleeping room. RATCLIFFE retires, bowing his head. As the woman crosses back to the door on the left, she is met by a nurse, who with whispers gives her an empty phial. The woman goes out with this by the door on the right, the nurse remaining at the other door, and listening. She then starts and hurries inward. The woman returns with the phial and is met by the doctor, issuing from door on left. He has a glass, and, holding the phial to the light, pours

some of it out carefully, drop by glimmering drop. Meanwhile the room is growing gradually lighter and more light. The nurse now quickly emerges, touching the doctor and motioning within. She and the doctor retire within, the woman standing beside the door motionless. Reënter RATCLIFFE hastily and stealthily; he draws the woman into the middle of the room and points to window, while a noise of hoofs is heard approaching and ceases outside. A soldier now enters hurriedly, but, about to speak, is motioned to silence by RATCLIFFE

and the woman. RATCLIFFE takes soldier down.

RATCLIFFE. Your news? But soft, in whisper.

SOLDIER. Victory!

Pomfret relieved! — Sir Hubert from hot fight

Returning — well-nigh home — already.

Listen.

[Far off is heard the sound of the Puritan hymn of victory. It grows louder and louder. There is a sound of commotion without, and enter LISLE, casting aside his armour as he comes, followed by certain captains.

LISLE. How is it with the child?

[*The woman and RATCLIFFE motion
him to silence.*]

WOMAN. Hush, sir, be still.

The moment is approaching and the
struggle.

LISLE. Let me go in to him. Hold
me not back.

[*He rushes to door, but is met by
nurse, with finger on lip. She
stands before the door.*]

NURSE. Hist! do not now disturb him.

Now is come

The moment when he wakes or sleeps for
ever.

[LISLE *signs to officers to withdraw, which they do in silence with bowed heads, and stealthily followed by* RATCLIFFE. *The nurse and woman retire within, silently.* LISLE, *left alone, goes to window at back, and, holding up his hands, causes the chanting of the soldiers, which has come nearer and nearer, to subside and cease. He comes down to the door and stands by it, breathing heavily.*

LISLE. God! God!

Reënter doctor, who stands with bowed head at door, unnoticed at first by LISLE, who at length sees him

The child is dead?

DOCTOR.

The child is dead.

[Exit back into room.

LISLE. The sin of David mine, and mine
the doom!

Would I had found the death I sought with
passion,

There in the storm of swords round Pomfret
keep!

Yet she—'tis she whom now I must re-
member ;

She is alone with him and makes no cry.

No! she is very silent: most she needs

My arm supporting, and upholding words.

With her must I abide, lift, and sustain
her.

Enter MIRIAM. She stands alone by the door.

MIRIAM. What have I done, that God
hath taken my child?

LISLE. [*Hesitatingly and tenderly.*] How
should thy deed bereave him of his
breath?

MIRIAM. [*Slowly recognising LISLE.*]
And thou! thou wast his father, wast
thou not?

LISLE. And am thy husband upon
whom to lean.

MIRIAM. How have I sinned? I do
not understand.

LISLE. O, Miriam —

MIRIAM. Wherefore was he dangled bright
Before my eyes a moment — then with-
drawn?

He had just learned to run alone; and I
Had taught him a few words — and he is
gone.

LISLE. How can I help you but a little,
tell me?

MIRIAM. The causeless theft! I say it
were relief

To feel that here I paid for some far
sin.

Sooner heaven's ire than heaven's indiffer-
ence!

O, Hubert, yes — on me this doom has
fallen.

LISLE. On thee! Why thee?

MIRIAM. I rushed into thy arms
In headlong passion and in frenzied blood,

And recked not of my husband, nor of
law.

This is my punishment!

LISLE. Why charge thyself?

Shall we accuse us of the frozen bird,
Plead guilty to the fallen buds of spring?

MIRIAM. That bud was mine; and I
have cankered it:

And though my boy came from me with-
out spot,

And though his body from the scythe of
Death

Lieth as sweet as mown grass in the even,
Yet on his soul were deep transmitted
stains,

And tell tale scars, to spirits visible.

LISLE. Peace!

MIRIAM. I am held unworthy, as
who should say —

“She is unclean: ah, trust her not with
babes.”

Sir, I was no fit mother for your child.

LISLE. Miriam!

MIRIAM. A mother? No! not
even a nurse.

I had known too much to dare undress
thy babe.

Where lived I ere I came into your
service?

Had you made close enquiry — you had
straight

Discharged me.

LISLE. Wife !

MIRIAM. Yet there where he is gone,
There's none so pure could tend on him
as I,

So brood above his opening eyes at dawn.
When was I wanting found? When, for
one instant?

When was I caught a sentinel asleep?
What flash of absence, lightning of repose,
Is urged against me? Why, I did behold
And hear the coming hours approach like
foes,

The night a thief, the stars with poised
spears,

The sun like an incendiary rushed.

LISLE. Belovèd !

MIRIAM. Yet that madness all outweighs ;
In blind blood have I sinned, and he is
struck.

And you! I have made you suffer!
You'll not speak.

Yet the gripped hand, the soldier-silence
tell.

Mercy, mercy, my lord !

[She casts herself at his feet.

LISLE. In mercy rise!
Cling not about my feet! Loose you my
knees!

I will not see you suffer or abased!
Shudder away from me! Mine was the sin.
I, I alone have brought this vengeance
down.

MIRIAM. Ah!

LISLE. He that *was* your husband —

MIRIAM. What of him?

LISLE. Fell in the wild assault of
Bolingbroke.

MIRIAM. Yes, yes!

LISLE. Yet died he by no accident.

MIRIAM. Hubert, this is all dark!

LISLE. Whoe'er should lead
That desperate onslaught, he must surely die.
I sent your husband.

MIRIAM. Knowing this?

LISLE. Because
I knew it. I'll not spare myself; I'll bare
This traitor heart unto your eyes at last.
I am no common murderer, Miriam.

I slew not in the open, nor in haste,
Nor wracked with jealousy: I trapped
him to it,
Beguiled him with some common conference,
Then wrote a letter marking him for death,
And watched him ride, dying, into the night.

MIRIAM. Therefore wast thou so cold,
and could'st not kiss me.

Away!

LISLE. He stood between us.

MIRIAM. Touch me not!

LISLE. The path to you across his body lay.

MIRIAM. Blood is upon you!

LISLE. Yet — yet!

MIRIAM. Not his blood,

O murderer!

LISLE. And if murderer I be,

Then for thy sake am I a murderer.

MIRIAM. No! not of him.

LISLE. Of whom then?

MIRIAM. Of my child.

LISLE. That which I did, I did with
reeling sense!

I see the moon still on thy tumbled hair,
That smile that made a mist of the great
world.

MIRIAM. O will you dare to make me
your accomplice?

'Twas I that set you on, I beckoned
you?

LISLE. No! but thy moonlit beauty mad-
dened me.

MIRIAM. Ah! will you speak of beauty
at this moment?

This beauty! and my boy so close and cold,
I sicken through all my body. Then these
eyes

That still shine, and these lips that dare to
speak,

This bosom, very snow from hills of Hell,
This flesh which still I wear, whispered
you on?

This body was the bait then and the
lure

That woo'd you to that murder — and, my
God,

This — this conceived my darling! Dead
is he?

When was he ever otherwise than dead?

As soon as quickened, sentenced, judged
already,

Long, long ere he was born.

LISLE.

I, I alone

Am stained.

MIRIAM. [*In frenzy.*] I'll mar this body
—loose your hold.

Grasp not my wrists — this poison-tree I'll
cleave.

LISLE. On me thy fury! Me! Here is
thy aim!

I only have sinned!

MIRIAM. [*With gradual calm.*] Yet this
did lure thee on.

Now on the wild night-festival of sense
The spirit morning dawneth — or is't per-
haps

Merely the drunkard's morning penitence —
A misery matutinal? All our marriage
Had from the first this taint on it. No
more

We'll meet, nor ever touch hands, nor for
a moment

Glance in each other's eyes, for here I see
God's finger fallen.

[*With a certain weary sweetness.*] Hubert
—it is past,

My wrath with thee—but let us fly each
other.

Between, an angel stands with flaming
sword,

And at his feet the body of our babe.

Quickly! Apart! Let water roll between us!

Away, like those first parents out of Eden!

Fiery behind us gates of Paradise!

LISLE. Yet was her hand in his for all
the wrath.

Still, still you love me? Tell me this at
least!

MIRIAM. Yes! but our love is as a thing
accursed.

LISLE. Woman, I grope to find you, but
I cannot.

O, is there no way to you, and no path,
No winding path?

MIRIAM. No way for thee to me.

LISLE. Dear, have I lost you utterly?

MIRIAM. For ever!

LISLE. God, can thy sea divide as does
 this sea,

O God, what is Thy severing grave to
 this?

[A pause; then, approaching her wistfully.]

The child did you resemble in his smile,
Yet me about the brow a little.

MIRIAM. Hush!

LISLE. Leave me not utter darkness,
 give me some

Gleam of a far-off meeting ere we die,

Somewhere at last, at last in a strange
land,

Or shingle at the ending of the world!

MIRIAM. I am utterly a-cold and without
hope.

I would creep in beside the dead for
warmth.

LISLE. Being so cold, love, whither will
you wander?

MIRIAM. Away! to live with all dumb
things that yearn.

I'll nest with thee, thou mother bird re-
turned,

I feel thy dreadful circlings in my blood.

I'll be the friend of the robbed lioness;

Above me, lo! the unhindered desert moon!

O I am stone to human life henceforth !

Yet, if I feel, I feel we two must part.

LISLE. [*After a struggle.*] Come, then.

Good-by. Give me your hand once.

MIRIAM. [*Turning and seeing him.*] Ah !

Why did you turn *his* eyes upon me
then ?

I cannot go for a moment.

LISLE. [*Coming close to her.*] Why at
all ?

Miriam, it seems that now for the first
time

We two are joined together, man and
wife.

[*She makes to go.*] No, listen ! Then go
from me if you will.

Our former marriage, though by holy bell
And melody of lifted voices blest,
Was yet in madness of the blood conceived,

And born of murder: therefore is the
child

Withdrawn, that we might feel the sting
of flesh

Corruptible; yet he in that withdrawal,
Folded upon the bosom of the Father,
Hath joined us in a marriage everlasting;
[*She raises her head.*] Marriage at last
of spirit, not of sense,

Whose ritual is memory and repentance,
Whose sacrament this deep and mutual
wound,

Whose covenant the all that might have
been.

[*Solemnly.*] And to this troth majestic
shadows throng,

And stand about us in dumb sympathy.

In presence of these silent witnesses,

And one perchance that carrieth now a babe,

I take in mine thy hand and call thee
wife —

Wife, wife, till the grave-shattering trumpet!

MIRIAM.

Yet

I want the little hands and feet of him.

LISLE. Dear, in a deeper union are we
bound

Than by the earthly touch of him, or
voice

Human, or little laughs in the sun.

We by bereavement henceforth are be-
trothed,

Folded by aspirations unfulfilled,

And clasped by irrecoverable dreams:

*[She falls with a cry on his heart,
where he holds her fast.]*

Last, by one hope more deep than cer-
tainty,

That though the child shall not return to
us,

Yet shall we two together go to him.

MIRIAM. *[Slowly taking his hand to lead
him.]* Will you come in with me and
look at him?

[Exeunt slowly, with bowed heads.]

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